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Little Foxes



By R. H. Stoddard

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LITTLE FOXES,

AND HOW TO CATCH THEM.

BY THE

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"NOT YOUR OWN," ETC.



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I.

THE TENDER GRAPES.

"Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines; for our vines have tender grapes."—SOLOMON'S SONG ii. 15.

I FANCY Solomon had been in the vineyards when he wrote this, and had seen mischief done. The vines had been carefully planted and trained, the soil had been enriched, a fence had been made, the stones gathered out; but for all this, sad havoc has been made, and much labour lost. The vine branches are trailing on the ground, the ripening clusters have been crushed and bruised, their beauty gone, and many a bunch become utterly worthless. An enemy has done it: but who has it been? Not the wild boar out of the wood wasting it, or the wild beast breaking it down and trampling it underfoot. No: it is a humbler foe. A sly cunning fox has found a little gap in the hedge, and has forced himself in; and now all this damage and harm has followed, which many a day's labour cannot repair.

Ah, we must take more pains and trouble in this matter. We must be more careful to make up the fence. We must set traps to catch these crafty enemies ; for they spoil our vines, undo our work, and rob us of our pleasant fruits when just about to gather them in.

But we speak of another vineyard, and of other fruits.

These "tender grapes:" what are they, and where do they grow?

I suppose we may take them for those beautiful fruits of righteousness which adorn the Christian and the Church of God. The various graces of the Christian character: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, the spirit of true filial prayer, humility and brokenness of heart in the remembrance of sin; a longing after the image of Christ; the unselfish kindness that seeketh not her own; the heavenliness that looks up to a Father's house; the praising, thankful heart that will bless God at all times;—these are all tender grapes, very beautiful and very precious.

We might add the outcome of these graces as seen in the life: every zealous effort to do good; every loving word and deed; in fact, everything that has in it something of Christ, and is done *after His mind and will.*

Or we might liken these "tender grapes" to the beginnings of a new and better life : the first wish for better things ; the early growth of repentance, or of a desire after God ; the sigh of the prodigal child in the far country ; the newly-formed purpose to attend the house of God ; that which is only very imperfect, very unripe fruit ; and yet there is a true striving after something yet unattained.

But where do these pleasant fruits grow ? Where may we look for them to come to due perfection ?

They are only to be found on the branch of "the True Vine." Not on the brier, or the thorn-bush of corrupt human nature ; not on the wild olive-tree of natural powers or unsanctified intellect ; but on the branch living and abiding in the Vine of God's own right hand. All goodness and righteousness flow from vital union with Christ. Unregenerate man cannot bring forth the fruits of grace. There needs a mighty change. He must be cut off from the old stem of Adam, and be grafted by faith into the Second Adam. He must have a new life and a new power and strength from Him who died for us here and rose again.

Believe it, for it is God's own truth. Acceptance in the Beloved must precede the work of

faith and the labour of love. Convinced of sin by the Holy Spirit, we must look to Christ, and to Christ alone, for pardon and salvation. In Him there is no condemnation ; for He has died our death and borne our sins, suffering the Just for the unjust that He might bring us to God. In Him we have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption ; yea, all that we can possibly need. Accepting Him as our Saviour, the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God ; and in filial trust we cry, "Abba ! Father."

But to bear the pleasant fruits of faith, we must "abide" in Christ. It is not enough that we come to Him at first, but we must cling to Him, depend upon Him, rely upon Him, day by day and hour by hour. We must receive constantly out of His fulness the fruit-producing sap, the grace and virtue of His Holy Spirit.

If there is separation from Christ, at once we begin to fail.

Take your penknife, make an incision between the stem and that slender branch, and though the eye of the passer by may be unable to see the cut, yet from that moment the branch can only wither and die. No more life, no more *growth*, no more fruit can be found in it.

So is it with the Christian. Separate the soul

from Christ, let the heart depart from Him, let a man cease to look to Him and depend upon Him ; and henceforth, whilst the backsliding lasts there can be nothing but spiritual decay and death. Others may be unable to discern the change, outward ordinances may still be attended, and duties in common life performed much as usual, but the Great Husbandman has seen it and knows it. Until there be a hearty return to the Saviour, on that branch no fruit will grow henceforth for ever.

Remember it, Christian, all power for fruit-bearing is in constant abiding union with Christ. Diligently use all the means of grace,—prayer, meditation on the Word, the Lord's Supper, converse with God's people,—but do not rest in them. Let them lead you to depend more and more on Christ Himself, and quicken and strengthen your faith and love to Him. Let the language of your heart ever be—

“What without Thee can I be?
What without Thee can I do?”

Never forget this point. Separation from Christ brings with it fruitlessness, decay, death, the fire of judgment. Abiding union with Christ brings power, holiness, comfort, usefulness, glory. *Ever keep close to Christ, for it is your life.*

And keep in the sunshine. The fruit cannot be sweet and luscious without the warm beams of the sun ripening it. So, Christian, dwell much in the love and joy of Christ. Delight yourself ever in Him,—in His loving presence, in His unfailing sympathy, in His ready and powerful help, in His unchangeable faithfulness and truth. “Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice.”

And forget not how precious the tender grapes are in the eye of the Great Husbandman : “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit ; so shall ye be my disciples.” No tongue can tell how the Father delights in the holiness, happiness, and usefulness of His children. He rejoices over them with joy and singing. He accepts their least services, and never despiseth the day of small things. He marks their sighs and tears, their works and labours of love, their patience of hope, their wish to please Him more and more. He looks upon them as the leaven that is to leaven the whole lump, as a witness for Him in a world flooded with iniquity. He regards everything that is holy and righteous with approbation, for it is the fruit of His own Spirit in the heart. Therefore we must take heed, and guard and watch over these precious graces. We must put off all

that mars and destroys them. We must resolutely cast off the ten thousand little things that are ever ready to turn us aside.

To assist my readers in this is the object I have in view in these chapters. They will touch very practical matters which concern every one of us. Let us lay to heart the perils that are near, and endeavour to avoid them. With the good Spirit as our Guide and Instructor, let us search out the little foxes in their dens and hiding-places. Let us beat the wood and set traps by the way. Let us catch and kill them whenever we can, and prevent them longer from doing injury to ourselves and others. By prayer we shall prevail. "The help that is done upon earth, God doeth it Himself."

"Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and prosper Thou the work of our hands upon us; O prosper Thou our handiwork."

II.

THE POWER OF LITTLE THINGS.

SOLOMON is very emphatic here. It is "the little foxes" which do the mischief. If the vines are injured, if the beautiful clusters are destroyed, he warns us that it is the little foxes which have crept in and have been the culprits. I want to linger over this thought. I want every reader to lay to heart the importance of little things.

"Is it not a little one?" is the excuse of many a soul when entering upon a course that will be fatal to all peace and happiness.

Yes : it may look a little one, but for that very reason be the more on your guard. A man's life is made up of little things. "He that despiseth little things shall fall by little and little."

Let me leave the illustration on which these papers are founded ; and in other matters see the truth of which I speak.

A tiny hair has in some way found an entrance

into the works of a watch. It touches one of the inner wheels, and so again and again the watch stops or goes irregularly. Much valuable time is in consequence lost, and only after its removal does the watch prove useful to its owner.

A spark of fire has fallen upon some inflammable materials. It is but a spark at first, but it soon kindles a flame. By-and-by through that one spark a noble pile of warehouses is burnt to the ground.

A small screw has not been carefully fastened in the boiler of an engine. For a time no harm comes of it; but after a little the defect loosens other parts of the machinery. An unlooked for catastrophe shortly afterwards occurs. The boiler explodes and spreads devastation and death far and wide. Many lives are sacrificed; property worth many thousands of pounds destroyed; and when the matter is examined it has been found to arise from a little carelessness in the way I have named.

A mighty ship is about to be launched. It has cost a large sum, and is fitted to cross the ocean and carry precious merchandise. But it will not move. Day after day is spent in vain in trying to get it off the stocks. At length the reason is discovered. A small pebble beneath

the keel in a critical position had been the cause of all the trouble.

The tiny hair, the spark, the screw, the pebble, have often their counterpart in the Christian life. A permitted inconsistency stands in the way and hinders the working of the Saviour's love in the heart. A miss word does a world of harm. A neglected duty brings evil to thousands. A little stone in the way—a wrong thought or motive—prevents the soul launching forth into the ocean of Divine love.

But I would dwell more at length on the illustration which more properly belongs to our subject. Take the foxes, yea, the little ones, let not one of them escape. If you would be secure, you must be determined to spare none—not even the very smallest.

Bear in mind "the little foxes" are specially dangerous, because they creep into the vineyard so secretly. They often get in unobserved. Even so little sins and faults have a peculiar power to beguile the conscience. They often pass unchallenged. They make but little noise or show, and therefore they deceive the heart, and do their deadly work while men are fast asleep.

Bear in mind also that little foxes will soon *grow*. Week by week, month by month, very

insensibly the little one is growing stronger and larger ; and the one you thought at first a mere plaything, and that it were a shame even to touch it, because it was so small, becomes an over-bearing tyrant that will withstand you to the face.

Is not this true of every sin? It grows by use and habit. Its strength and power is constantly on the increase. "Wicked men and seducers grow worse and worse."

Secret sins are the forerunners of presumptuous sins. If evil be cherished in the deep of the heart, if unholy desires are permitted to remain, soon may follow some terrible breach of the Divine law. Our safety is in watching against the first step aside. We must not treat lightly the smallest deviation from truth and righteousness. A striking old proverb puts it well: "Over shoes, over boots." If you once put your foot in the mire of sin, you will sink deeper and deeper. I have heard it put in another way. When first you go out with clean boots you are careful to avoid the mud ; but after a while, when they are soiled, you do not so much mind, but go across the mire of the street without heeding it. So when the life is comparatively pure you shrink from evil ; but when the conscience is once defiled by wilful sin, you

grow careless and indifferent as to what lengths you go in it. Therefore take good heed on this account. Remember, sin grows, and grows fast. Watch against the beginnings of evil.

Then there is another peril in little sins. The little foxes are dangerous, because they make a track for others to follow. A little thief may creep in at the window and open the door for those who are lurking near. So a little fox may lead the way for a troop of others to enter the vineyard. The path is easier to find. The hedge will be broken down, or the opening in the wall made larger; so that where at first there came but one, and that one a little one, by-and-by a whole tribe will be found, and the vineyard utterly laid waste.

So is it with sins. One makes way for another, and each one that goes before makes it easier for others to follow. There is a boon companionship in sins as well as in graces. You never find them alone. If you find in the heart the spirit of humanity and faith, you will find also love, prayer, patience, holiness, dwelling there also. So, too, do sins accompany one another. Take one the world reckons a very slight one,—the neglect of God's Holy Day. What do you find frequently following in the *wake*? A young man forsakes the House of God

and the Bible Class, and regards the Sabbath as merely a day for rest or pleasure. Very often the evil increases fast. He takes up with bad company, becomes loose in his talk; finds his way to the drinking saloon; then, perhaps, gets into profligate habits, and not seldom acts dishonestly to supply means for his extravagance. In this way very often a young life is blighted and robbed of all its fair prospects, and perhaps the man ends his days in a prison or the parish union. In this and many similar ways one sin is linked unto another, and wretchedness, poverty, shame, and temporal and eternal death are their bitter fruit.

Look at the first sin that crept into our world. Truly it might seem to some a small matter, but it was the little fox that destroyed the tender grapes. It begins with a look and a wish. Eve sees the fruit and longs for it. Then she gives ear to the Tempter. She believes his lie, and doubts the truth and the goodness of God. She touches, she takes, she tastes, she persuades her husband to taste likewise. Thus the evil spreads. All the joys of paradise are forfeited. The image of God in the soul is lost. Briers and thorns spring up in the ground. Sins and sorrows without end spring up in the world. One sin, as we might

think a little one, has become a giant, and evil of every kind overspreads the face of the earth. The whole world groans beneath the violence, wickedness, and oppression that lie heavy upon it. And to this hour, the issue of that sin is seen in the ten thousand times ten thousand forms of vice and ungodliness which cover the earth, and fill mankind with untold misery and woe.

Or take another example. Take an envious, covetous thought. Look at Ahab. Naboth will not part with his vineyard. So he comes home and yields to a repining, murmuring spirit. He will take no food, and jealousy and discontent fill his mind. Ah, the little fox has crept in! What will follow? Robbery, false witness, murder, involving a whole city in the guilt of the cruel and wicked deed. And it all arises as the result of a wrong thought cherished in the heart.

There is one other point about what we call "little sins" that ought not to be forgotten. We can only in any sense speak of them as such when treating of man's judgment. The heart-searching Judge of all mankind has a very different standard to ours. We may reckon that a small thing which the Lord may reckon *a most deadly crime*. He judgeth not as man

judgeth : man looketh at the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh at the heart. Men weigh but little thoughts and motives. Yet before God it is these which constitute a man's true character. In His sight thoughts are deeds. He sees in the germ the full-grown fruit. Hatred is murder : an unchaste look adultery. "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them," saith the Lord ; and as He knows He judges.

It seemed a small thing to Lot's wife to look back, but that look was fatal. It seemed but a small thing to Uzziah to touch the ark when it shook, but he perished in his sin. It seemed but a small thing in Herod to accept the flattering voice of the people, calling him a god ; but God smote Him with worms till he died.

Before God there is no little sin. Let us therefore take good heed to ourselves. "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults." "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."

III.

INDOLENCE.

HERE is one of the tribe that I very much dread. Indolence is a sleepy, drowsy, slow-footed fellow, but none the less dangerous for this. A more pestilent troubler of the vineyard is nowhere to be found. In spite of his drowsy look he is ubiquitous, lurking everywhere, and always doing mischief. There is no place where, some time or other, you may not see him.

You find him in *the street*. Here is a knot of men standing idle—keeping Saint Monday, as it is sometimes called. One of the six working days is lost and wasted, with no profit or pleasure to themselves and with great loss to their families and their employers.

You find him in *the Church*. Eutychus, who fell asleep and fell down from the loft and was taken up dead—he had not escaped injury at *his hands*. And often now the most wholesome *instructions are lost*,—the most suitable words

of prayer and praise are all without benefit,—because sloth shuts up the ear and the heart, and a dull heavy carelessness has hushed the soul to sleep.

You find him in *the shop* and in *the house of business*. Accounts are badly kept, letters are left unanswered, and orders not executed in time, goods are not at hand to supply to customers. So by-and-by failure succeeds and then debt, and the bankruptcy court, and I know not what else of discomfort and distress, arises.

He creeps into *the farm* or *the garden*, and weeds and thistles grow apace. Trees are left unpruned and seed-time is put off. So a well-nigh fruitless summer and harvest follows, and perhaps a new tenant has to come in and take possession where the former has neglected his work.

He creeps into *the school-room*, and you see a boy or girl dawdling over the lessons—looking here and there, and talking in an undertone to others; and then, at the end of the term, a very indifferent report is received, and little or no progress in study has been made; money has been spent by parents in vain, and a precious portion of life's spring-time is wasted and lost. He creeps into *the drawing-room*; and id

chit-chat and gossip takes up many a golden hour, and the novel beguiles away time that ought to be redeemed for something far higher ; and day passes day, and weeks fly by, and what is the fruit they leave behind ?

He creeps into *the kitchen*, and work is only half done. Nothing looks bright and clean. The cupboard is choked full of wasted remnants. The dinner is not cooked as it should be, and yet is half an hour late. Servants have no comfort, because five, or six, or seven o'clock comes, and everything is still in confusion ; when it required but a little more forethought and diligence, and they might have had an hour or two of quiet rest for themselves.

He creeps into *the bedroom* and robs men of the best hours of the day. At the last moment the effort to rise is made which ought to have been made half an hour or an hour sooner, and then all is hurry-skurry. There is scarcely a moment for washing or for dressing. A hasty prayer is said without a moment's reflection, or else is forgotten altogether. You come down when family prayer is over, or when breakfast has begun. All the day's duties are jostled out *of their place*. You can scarcely reach in time *the train or the omnibus*. A ruffled spirit *presents your comfort in work* ; and all has arisen

for want of a little diligence and self-denial in the early dawn.

Thus everywhere sloth and indolence creep in and do their deadly work. There is no possibility of reckoning the evil they do.

What endless trouble they often cause to their victims! "The way of the slothful man," says the Preacher, "is a hedge of thorns." What does this mean? Simply, the idle, slothful spirit, creates for itself thorns and briars, which perpetually wound and pierce it. You neglect a duty, and that one neglect brings after it trouble upon trouble. It may be in your home or in your business; but months elapse before you are free from the annoyance that has arisen through your own fault.

In the Book of Proverbs, *poverty* is continually spoken of as the fruit of sloth. Very striking is this under the image of the sluggard's vineyard: "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding: and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one th

travelleth; and thy want as an armed man." (Prov. xxiv. 30—34.)

An excellent fable is given at the commencement of Mr. Smiles' book on "Thrift," bearing on the same point. A grasshopper, half-starved with cold and hunger, came to a well-stored beehive at the approach of winter, and humbly begged the bees to relieve his wants with a few drops of honey. One of the bees asked him how he had spent his time all the summer, and why he had not laid up a store of food, like them? "Truly," said he, "I spent my time very merrily in drinking, dancing, and singing, and never once thought of winter." "Our plan is very different," said the bee: "we work hard in the summer to lay by a store of food against the season when we foresee we shall want it; but those who do nothing but drink and dance and sing in the summer must expect to starve in the winter."

Indolence, times without number, brings dire poverty in *temporal circumstances*. Here is a young man who will never give his time or thought to any work or study. He is a clergyman's son, and has as fair a prospect as any one *need wish*. But through indolence he throws it *away*. By-and-by his father dies, and he is *reduced to abject poverty*. He must take a

situation as porter for a few shillings a week, "to keep the wolf from his door."

Indolence brings *poverty of mind*. Spare hours and moments well improved, and you might have had all the chambers of the brain filled with pleasant and useful knowledge. You might have had a rich treasury of information for the good of children and neighbours and friends, as well as for your own comfort. But this fox has destroyed these tender grapes, and you often lack knowledge which might have been the greatest help to you.

But the worst result of all is *soul-poverty*. This is the greatest evil by far. Life's opportunities have passed by unimproved. You have redeemed no time for prayer, for searching the Scriptures, for self-examination, for doing God's work and advancing His kingdom. Self has been served, and sin indulged. And now the winter is at hand, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended," and you have no golden store laid up. Ah, poor soul! thou art poor indeed. Thou hast none of the bread of life to nourish thee, no robe of righteousness to cover thy guilty soul in the day of Judgment, not a coin of Heaven's mintage to carry with thee through the grave. Thou hast no heart-riches, no faith, no contrition, no love, no peace. Wha'

soever thou hast in the way of privilege, shall be taken from thee, and thy portion beyond the grave can only be poverty and shame.

Nay, but it need not be ! Life is not over yet. The past may have been wasted, but at least a few fragments remain. But use double diligence. Be alive and awake now. There is pardon for the past through Him who bore thy sin on the cross. There is help and restoration and grace to live better through the Spirit.

“ Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal :
‘Dust thou art, to dust returnest,’
Was not spoken of the soul.”

“ Not many lives, but only one have we : one—only one !
How sacred should that one life ever be—that narrow
span !

Day after day filled up with blessed toil,
Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil.”

But how shall you catch and kill this Fox ?
How shall you best be able to cast indolence and
sloth out of your vineyard ?

Reckon it a matter of *real importance*. Regard sloth and idleness as a positive sin. Regard it as a most necessary duty to be up and doing, and to make the most of life whilst you have it.

*Remember, your time is a precious talent,
for which you must give account by-and-by.*

Think over such texts as these: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." (Eccles. ix. 10.) "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." (John ix. 4.) "Redeeming the time." (Eph. v. 16.)

Be sure that indolence and sloth will *ruin your present peace*. They will prove a terrible injury to your soul. They will hinder your usefulness in your home and in the Church of God; whilst diligence, activity, and perseverance, earnestness in whatever you do, will open the door for ever-increasing prosperity and happiness.

Copy the noble *examples* left you in Holy Scripture. Think of Joseph and Nehemiah, and Daniel, and Paul; each in their sphere so faithful to God, and so active and laborious in their several duties. Above all, think of the example of the Master. Christ never was idle. He was never in a hurry, and yet He never wasted a moment. We often read in St. John's Gospel of "the next day." Each day had its appointed work, and every day was spent in doing good and in glorifying His Father in heaven. Seek to follow in His footsteps. By the mighty energy of the Holy Ghost quickening your soul, live while you live, and live to purpose.

Gather up the fragments. The moments and

the minutes are gold dust: don't throw the away. Especially remember the proverb, "The morning hour has gold in its mouth." Let the early part of each day be very carefully laid out to profit. Do not shrink from a little pains and trouble. If something is wrong, set about putting it right. If some forgotten duty crosses your mind,—if possible, on the instant,—see if you cannot do it. "Better late than never." Think of such words as these: "No pains, no gains." "No mill, no meal." "Make hay while the sun shines." "A stitch in time saves nine."

Determinately reject all needless excuses for delay. Don't put off a walk till the afternoon, when it would do you most good in the morning. Don't wait to do something till some one else is ready to help you in it. Leave nothing till to-morrow that ought to be done to-day. And, chiefest of all, neglect not the care of the soul. Labour to be rich,—rich indeed: rich in faith, rich in good works, rich towards God. "Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt."

IV.

SELFISHNESS.

HERE is another of these "Little Foxes" that destroy our vineyards and mar our work ; and I fancy there are few vineyards so favoured as not to have experienced damage from its inroads. The peculiarity of this fox is, that it has *very deep holes*. It goes far beneath the surface ; so that you may imagine you are free from danger, while all the time it is close at hand—only a few feet or yards under-ground. Then if you do discover your enemy in one hole, he is very crafty in making for another, so that you are still in as much danger as ever.


To speak plainly, Selfishness lurks in the depths of the heart. There may be a pleasant exterior, a kind, genial manner ; there may be much apparent courtesy, affable words, and gifts not a few ; and yet this vice is there, deeply embedded in the soul. And it often changes its abode. It may be exposed and driven out from one quarter, but take refuge in another. It may

forsake public life, and a man may be generous and open-handed amongst his fellows, but it may still reign undisturbed in the family. The outside world may take one view of such a person, but those who live with him may take quite another.

Before going further, I want to remind the reader of a great truth : *All selfishness is sin, and all sin is selfishness.*

All selfishness is sin ; for it breaks the human side of God's law : "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets." Selfishness utterly sets at nought precepts like these. So that if a man live ever so blamelessly in his outward walk, yet if this evil has dominion within, he is guilty of one of the blackest sins before God.

Equally true is it that *all sin is selfishness.* For whatever evil a man does, it corrupts others as well as himself. The influence spreads. The contagion pollutes men and women and children round about. More than this, selfishness is the root of many sins : fraud, deceit, drunkenness, strife, murder, and such-like, all come from selfishness in some shape or other. The oppression of the poor by the rich,—the disregard of a *master's interest* by his workmen,—the wasted



Monday, and perhaps Tuesday, that prevents work being finished and orders completed, that beggars and robs the wife and children,—what but selfishness is at the bottom of it all? Or, take the young man who gives the rein to his evil passions, and drags down a young companion, and blasts the promise of a happy life, and makes a fair flower to wither and fade and die; what terrible selfishness is here!

In a thousand other forms Selfishness comes into the vineyard, and never comes without bringing harm and loss.

A well-to-do tradesman is a member of a Christian congregation. He has some value for God's truth, and maintains a name for professing godliness. But he is no real help to his pastor, or the Lord's cause. He is strong and hearty, and a little work for Christ on the Sunday or week-day would be a real blessing to himself as well as to others. But no. Business and money-getting, and his family must have all his time and all his thoughts. He has really no time. He can't go out on Sunday afternoons. He never likes to ask others for money, still less to give very much; he never goes to a week-day meeting, and would feel out of his element in visiting the sick or poor. So Selfishness carries the day. And the pastor must do the best he

SELFISHNESS.

and parish work must be left undone, the Sunday-school may dwindle away for want of teachers, and all through this detestable fault of SELFISHNESS.

Take another case. A daughter has been educated at school and is living at home. There is a large family and much work to be done, and means are not over-plentiful. But she is no comfort to her mother. She rather likes to be a fine lady. The mother may go about the house, perhaps with baby in her arms, and toiled a slave night and day; but the daughter is busy thinking of her own pleasure. She is reading a novel, or doing her woolwork, or practising on the piano, or visiting friends; but by little help or assistance does she render to her poor overworked mother.

Or take another case. A young man is tak-

In each case it is Selfishness that is at work : a curse and a foe wherever it comes.

How shall we catch this fox? How shall we cast him out of the vineyard? Let us take the bright lamp of Holy Scripture to trace him to his den. Let us see Selfishness and heaven-born Charity side by side, that we may learn to cherish the one and eschew the other.

I see a lonely road, and a traveller attacked by robbers. They take from him all he possesses, strip him of his raiment, and leave him wounded and ready to perish. Unable to move or help himself, his only hope lies in the possible kindness of some passer-by. Soon his hope is aroused. One draws nigh who might be expected to come to his aid. The law had commanded that if an ass or an ox fall down by the way, a man may not hide himself from them, but help to lift them up again. Much more ought the priest to have succoured the wounded man. But he has no heart for the duty. He never comes near, or gives him so much as a look. Selfishness passes by on the other side.

But soon there comes another. He, too, is engaged in God's service, and might be expected to care for the suffering one. Ah, and it seems *he will!* He comes and looks upon him, and *surely he will help.* Not so. He is a cl

without water. It is a vain hope. He looks on, but he never tarries for a moment. Selfishness again goes its way, perhaps with a sigh, and leaves the man to perish.

But now comes holy, heaven-born Charity. The Samaritan is of another spirit to the priest and the Levite. He might have regarded the man as an alien and an enemy, but he seeks no excuse, and he makes none. If others leave the man to die, he will not. He shows true, unselfish kindness. Coming right up to the spot where the man is lying, looking upon his sad condition, compassion and pity fill his breast. He forgets himself and his journey, and thinks not of time or trouble or cost. He will do for the man all he can. He gives the best relief in his power, binding up the bleeding wounds and pouring in the healing remedies. He thinks of the man's feebleness, and mounts him on his own beast. He watches over him like a friend or a brother. He provides for the future as well as the present, promising the host to repay all needful expense.

The story is written for an everlasting memorial. If it be a story from real life, as most probably it is, the man's charity has been rewarded a thousandfold. For all through the *churches*, and in all generations, it has been a

legacy of love, and has stirred up the hearts of Christians to "go and do likewise."

But with this example we place one still higher: the example of the Lord Himself. We must even take Him as the Great Pattern in every virtue; so in this of genuine, unselfish love. His whole life was Love. He never thought of Himself, but was ever filled with the woes and wants of mankind. He lived in poverty, shame, and sorrow; he died a malefactor's death, to save and bless the wretched and the lost.

Christian, follow His footsteps. Be large-hearted, and filled with charity. Pray for the Holy Ghost that ye may be considerate of others' needs, and willing to cast self aside. Be not content to have a little tiny soul,—only large enough for your own important self and your own troubles and joys. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." "Weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice." The eye must not say to the ear, nor the hand to the foot, "I have no need of thee."

When you read the newspaper, take notice of anything that may arouse your compassion, and let no hardened insensibility creep over you

and go and do something, or you can, to relieve it. Try to attain of human woe, and to add the happiness of mankind. Be good, and open your eyes to what is required. Read over 1 Cor. 13 (the glorious portrait of Charity), and let it be engraven on your heart.

Never find plausible excuses or reasons for keeping your hand off, and saying "No" to the claims of the poor or religion. Don't wait till others do, till agents or societies are persuaded to support them. Don't spend large sums on luxurious entertainments, and dress, and hobbies, whatever they may be, on horses, or pictures, or books, or anything else, but leave the poor to their

V.

INDECISION.

I KNOW few things that bring more discomfort than a fickle, hesitating, undecided spirit. You ask a person to do something for you, or to come on such a day to see you, or to give you a subscription towards some charitable object, but you can get no clear answer. They will think over it. They are not quite sure. They must wait a few days before giving an answer ; and when the few days are passed you have still to wait on, for no answer comes. Thus you are left all in uncertainty. You cannot make up your accounts, or make application for some other help, or invite other friends beneath your roof. If your friend would only just make up his mind and say " Yes " or " No," you would be content, and know what steps to take ; but indecision leaves everything unsettled and makes every one uncomfortable.

But I want to speak of indecision in the

highest matters. If it is bad in temporal things, it is far worse in our dealings with Christ and His salvation. So many are always halting between two opinions: they never take a firm stand on the right side. To-day you think they are true followers of Christ, but to-morrow they are all for the world. They can be very serious at times, and express a great desire for the hope of the Gospel; but when thrown with worldly people, their religion seems all gone to the winds.

I suppose the reason is because of the two-sidedness of Christ's Gospel.

On the one side we have glorious hopes and blessed privileges. Deliverance from guilt and condemnation, free remission of the past debt of sin, a garment of perfect righteousness, peace with God, a place in His family, the comforts of His love, citizenship in the heavenly Zion, everlasting life, and a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Here is one side; but there is another. Those who believe in Christ, have day by day to take up the cross, to deny themselves, and to walk in the Master's footsteps. The way is often narrow, and the gate is strait. Reproach and *persecution* must be endured. Earthly idols *must be cast away*, and even life itself must be *sacrificed*, if our allegiance to Christ require it.

The Lord requires that His people should, when He calls for it, withhold nothing. A free heart, all we are and all we have, must be laid at His feet. "He that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple."

Hence comes a wavering, hesitating spirit. Persons would have the one side, but not the other. They wish for the privileges of the Gospel, but shrink from its precepts. They want the joys of God's people, but have no heart to bear the cross and confess Christ's name in the world. They dare not cast off the profession of the Gospel, lest they should be shut out of heaven; but again and again they turn aside from the King's highway, and walk in "by-path meadow."

Want of thorough decision is the root of great evil. Take a young person who delights to listen to the truth, and to a certain extent has a love for it, but there is no real earnestness or determined purpose of heart. The salvation of the soul has never been the first thing. There has been no fixed choice. There has been no hearty dedication to the Saviour's service.

The result before long comes out. *There is no real peace and no strength to meet temptation; and when some suitable snare is presented there is no power to overcome. Or if a sud-*

danger come and death approach, all is alarm and confusion.

A short time ago a young girl was taken from her earthly home after four days' illness. She was the daughter of Christian parents, and she had often been told the story of her Saviour's love. She was naturally amiable and pleasing; but those who lived with her could not tell how far she felt the power of God's Word. The hour of danger told the truth. When told that probably she might not recover, she exclaimed, "I cannot die: I have not loved the Saviour!" and from that moment every thought was centred in that one care. Her parched lips continually pleaded, "Oh, Jesus, teach me: help me, to love Thee!" She would not be comforted by false peace, and it was only at the very last that the clouds seemed to burst, and that she could see the Saviour to be her own.

Another case I remember, the very reverse of this, one that shows the blessedness of decision for God. A young girl of seventeen was sent from home to a school where she had many privileges. She worked hard at her lessons, doing in one year more than many girls in three. At this time her heart was touched by God's Holy Spirit. After weeks of prayer and earnest *inquiry* she gave herself unreservedly to the

Saviour, and found great peace. The next year she was laid low with an attack on the brain. Her life, so full of promise, seemed ebbing away: but the danger passed. Health was gradually restored. But what was the cause? It was due, under God, to the quiet, deep, calm peace which possessed her heart. Her medical adviser stated that had there been the slightest mental struggle or fear it must have been fatal to life or reason. She had given herself unreservedly to Christ, and she had a blessed reward. She had "perfect peace" in the hour of danger; and this, in God's hand, was the means of her recovery.

I can scarcely think of any little bit of advice I would more earnestly give to any who are anxious to be the disciples of Christ, than this: *Be out and out Christians. Don't blow hot and cold. Don't veer round from north to south, and from south to north. Be one thing, and one thing always,—in all places and in all companies.*

Christ has no room in His kingdom for those who keep back half the price. He has no room for almost Christians. He has no room for those who would call Him, "Lord, Lord," and yet chime in with the evil practices of those who will not have Him to reign over them. He hath said it plainly: "No man can serve two masters;" "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he

that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." (Matt. vi. 24 ; xii. 30.)

Away with all empty, hollow profession ! Away with all half-heartedness and Laodicean lukewarmness. Away with all doubleness of mind, expecting to taste the fruits of Paradise, and yet never to toil or labour in His vineyard ! All such religion is a delusion and a sham.

Be decided for God. Leaning on Christ, relying upon the heavenly assistance of the Holy Ghost, be a fearless and faithful follower of the Lamb. Be a Christian altogether : not a Christian on Sunday and a worldling on Monday ; not a Christian in lip and a worldling in life ; not following Christ in fair weather and forsaking Him in foul, but holding fast your profession at all times and in all circumstances.

Be decided. Think of the example of your great Master. He walked straight on through good report and ill, through toil and through suffering, through contempt and reproach, to do His Father's will. He set His face like a flint. He steadfastly went forward to die a malefactor's death for our sake. He did all that was needful for our salvation, and then was received back to His glory.

Even so let it be with you. You must walk *in His footsteps*. You must stand fast in faith

and hope. You must suffer with Christ if you would reign with Him. You must bear the cross if you would wear the crown.

Be decided. It is the only safe course. To be almost a Christian will never save you. If you were living in a village near a volcano, and there were signs of danger, it would not profit to think of leaving your home, or even being almost persuaded to do so. When the burning lava stream overwhelmed the village you might perish after all. But if you quitted the spot and took up your abode in a place of safety, then the peril could not touch you. So must you act in the matter of your salvation. You must forsake the evil that is in the world ; you must fly from sin and judgment, to Christ the only Refuge ; you must give yourself up altogether to Him, and then you are safe. No harm can then come nigh you. You have a shelter which no storm of wrath can ever invade.

Be decided. To be so makes the path of life plain and clear. To act like Balaam,—to long for the gold and silver, and go as far as you dare to obtain it, and yet profess to obey God,—ah, this is a wretched, miserable course ! In acting in this spirit, a man is drawn hither and thither, and knows not which way to take. There is a constant battle between conscience and character.

But let a man take God's standard, and abide by it ; let him desire only to do God's will as far as he sees it ; let him put God first and everything else second, and he will have peace ; his path will usually lie clear before him : he may have opposition to encounter and loss to suffer, but he will have God on his side, and his conscience will be at rest.

Be decided. You will thus honour God and be a blessing in the world. You will be a pillar of strength in the Church of Christ. Waverers and faint-hearted disciples will see you and be reproved. Those who yet are strangers to Divine peace will see there is a power in true religion. Men will know where to find you, and what you mean. There will be no doubt on which side you are. And you will leave a mark behind. When your work is done, you will be missed by your fellow-Christians, and your name and memory will be blessed. The remembrance of your example will allure others to walk in the way of life. Just as the example and last words of Joshua were blessed to the whole generation who had seen and known him, so your fixed and steadfast purpose to serve the Lord will not be forgotten when you are in the grave.

Be decided. A bright and glorious crown shall ~~be yours~~. Take the words of promise : " Those

at honour Me, I will honour." "If any serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there will also my servant be: if any man serve Me, I will my Father honour." (John xii. 26.)

Who are these, like stars appearing,—
These before God's throne who stand?
Each a golden crown is bearing:
Who are all this glorious band?
Alleluia! hark they sing,
Praising loud their Heavenly King.

Who are these in dazzling brightness,
Clothed in God's own righteousness:
These, whose robes of purest whiteness
Shall their lustre still possess?
Still untouch'd by time's rude hand:
Whence come all this glorious band?

These are they who have contended
For their Saviour's honour long,
Wrestling on till life was ended,
Following not the sinful throng:
These, who well the fight sustained,
Triumph by the Lamb have gained.

These are they who watch'd and waited,
Offering up to Christ their will,
Soul and body consecrated
Day and night to serve Him still:
Now in God's most holy place,
Blest they stand before His face.

VI.

THE LOVE OF MONEY.

THERE are two marked peculiarities about this fox. You may tell it by its bright, golden hue. Its skin glitters in the sunshine. But another thing: it is insatiably greedy. It can never be satisfied. It can devour the most unlikely provisions, but is more hungry at the end than at the beginning. Bank-notes, securities, gold, silver, and copper, the property of the fatherless, the wages of the poor, the welfare of the working man, sobriety, truth, righteousness, equity, peace of conscience,—all this it can make away with; and yet is ever craving after more and more. In fact, if you could give it a mountain of gold and silver, and even all that the world contains, it would never say “Enough!” but would go about the world pining and bewailing that there was no more to be had.

The harm that this intruder brings with it into the vineyard is very graphically described *by St. Paul*. “The love of money is the root (or

a root) of all evil, which, while some covet after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." He also speaks very hard words of this evil elsewhere. He classes the money-loving people to whom he refers in his epistles with idolators and fornicators, and tells them that they shall alike be shut out of the kingdom of heaven. He warns ministers of Christ not to be "greedy of filthy lucre," and says that godliness is the true gain which Christians should seek after.

Depend upon it, the love of money is one of the most powerful enemies of true grace in the soul, and also one of the most destructive adversaries of peace and happiness in life. The habit of hoarding up money, and setting the heart on the increase of it, not seldom destroys family affection. The bread-winner of the family is so engrossed with it early and late, that whilst toiling for his children he seldom sees much of them: there is no time to let the flowers of love unfold, and for heart to be knit to heart. Abundance of every kind is upon the table, but the true feast of home joys and loving hearts is never tasted. Ah, it is a great evil! A *golden wall* separates father from child; and with all the wealth that comes in, there is far less real comfort than might be enjoyed with half the means.

I remember a very extreme case of this evil, and how terrible were the crimes it led to, and no less terrible the retribution that followed. The incident was told me by a friend from India, who knew the man of whom it speaks. He was a slave-master in Travancore, and he had one only daughter. To obtain for her an advantageous marriage, he determined by any means to get a large sum of money for her dowry ; and he did it by robbery, cruelty, and in some cases even by murder. His slaves attacked boats on the river known to contain valuable wares, taking the spoil, sometimes even slaying the owners, and then dividing these ill-gotten goods with their master. By-and-by his aim was accomplished. The dower was obtained, and the daughter well married. But by some strange mistake, in the dark of the evening, many miles from the father's house, the slaves attacked the marriage party on their way home, and in the strife killed the daughter for whom all his wealth had been accumulated. Childless and broken-hearted, the father went down to his grave, the victim of his own avarice and wickedness.

But whilst in some rare cases the love of money may lead to crimes of this deadly character, *it more frequently takes a very different*

shape. Hiding itself beneath an exterior of moral character, and even of marked religious profession, it no less leads the soul astray, and often to a final departure from the faith in Christ. It becomes the one ruling passion, to which everything else must bend. It forms around the heart a veil and film of worldliness which enshrouds it in abiding death. It arrests the force of any good impression, and makes prayer and communion with God utterly unreal and profitless.

I will give an instance of this from the mission-field of South India. A man had apparently received the truth and believed in Christ. He was an active, useful member of the Church, and seemed likely to prove one of its valuable helpers. But the great enemy put a stone in the way. He attacked him by this fox of Money-getting. The man was persuaded in an evil moment to buy from a neighbour some bad debts. He gave a small sum, in the hope of recovering debts three or four times the amount of the sum he paid. But it became a deadly snare to the man. How to get the money became his thought night and day; and in trying to get in these sums of money he lost his own treasure. He gradually forsook the fear and love of God, *he lost the comfort he had once found in religion,*

and not long after apostatized from Christ and relapsed into heathenism. No entreaties could prevail upon him to withstand the temptation, and at length he cast aside altogether his profession of Christ's Name. It was precisely the danger of which Paul wrote. Through the love of money "he erred from the faith." It was the peril of which Christ warned His disciples, when he spoke of the "deceitfulness of riches" as one of the thorns which would "choke the Word."

It is the same now amongst ourselves. An inordinate craving after money fills the ground of the heart, and leaves room for little beside. It may be in a small way, where a working man by temperate habits is able to save fifty or a hundred pounds, and henceforth, instead of being the slave of drink, he becomes the slave of money. Or it may be in the case of one who is turning over tens of thousands every year, and is rearing up a fortune of no small amount. The danger is alike in both cases.

Of course there is no harm in doing your best for the welfare of your family, if in accordance with God's will. Every man ought to be diligent in business and to do his best in whatever he takes in hand; but the evil is *in making it the one thing*. The care of the soul, the week-day service, work *for others*, deeds of kindness and benevolence,

prayer, Bible reading, the family altar,—all must be sacrificed and go to the wall rather than a few pounds be lost, or some advantage in business relinquished.

There is another widespread evil side by side with the spiritual apathy which so often accompanies an eagerness to be rich. The evil I mean has been well put in the words, “an India-rubber conscience ;” a conscience that will stretch to almost any extent, if the claims of business or money-getting require it.

Men try to cloak their sin in this respect by clever excuses : “ Religion is religion, and business is business ;” “ Every one expects to have certain deductions from the stated quantity ;” “ Other tradesmen act in the same way, and it cannot be avoided ;” “ If I were so particular I should lose my custom, and soon come to the workhouse.”

By self-deception of this kind persons try to hush conscience to sleep, and cry Peace, peace, when there is no peace. God cannot be mocked by vain words. Sin is sin, theft is theft, lying is lying all the world over,—wherever it is practised and how many soever there may be that practise it. You may dress a wolf in sheep’s clothing, but it is a wolf still. You may clothe a sin in a fair dress of justice, but it is sin still.

And how great a sin this is we may see in the many ways in which the love of money leads men to break the laws of God, and to be unfaithful in their duty one to another.

Trust monies are applied for purposes of speculation ; the bankruptcy court is made use of to escape debts which were contracted in the knowledge that you could not pay them ; huge commercial frauds and defalcations are perpetrated, which bring misery and distress to honest, hardworking men, and needy widows and orphans ; innumerable efforts are made to beg or borrow money under false pretences ; lies are acted as well as spoken ; men speak with a double meaning, true in the letter but false in the spirit ; weights and measures are tampered with ; cotton and silk is not so long as named on the reel ; a spoonful of sugar is taken out when the pound is weighed ; false marks of quality deceive the buyer ; all kinds of business lies and questionable practices are treated as a necessary part of the trade : such an article is the best we have in stock, or is the newest pattern, when it is neither the one nor the other ; such a print will wash well, when the first time it is washed it is utterly spoilt ; such a pair of *shoes or boots* are home-made, when they came *two hundred miles* from a slop shop : Sunday

traffic is defended on the ground that customers will have the goods on that day or go elsewhere ; wares are sent out of defective quality with the best at the top ; money is made by betting, gambling, and by decoying the young and unwary to their certain ruin ;—all this and much more might be told of the power of this snare of the love of money, in all places and in all ranks of society. Under the plea of custom or necessity the conscience is gagged, and the solemn warnings of Scripture are cast to the winds.

But how can this evil fox be overcome ? How may men learn to be diligent without being covetous ? How may they learn to use the world without abusing it ? How may they put money in its true position, using it for their own good and the glory of God, instead of it being a stumbling-block and a hindrance in their path ?

I have no new remedies to give, but I believe the old ones are sufficient if only they are used.

In the Word of God there is given us a power to overcome this and every other sin. Amongst the Corinthians were some who aforetime had been "covetous," as well as others who had been "drunkards and revilers," but alike they had been "washed, sanctified, and justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

Would you conquer the love of money? Then you must have the faith and love of Christ. The love of money is strong, but the love of Christ realized in the power of the Holy Ghost is stronger; and faith in Christ overcomes the world. If you trust in Christ, if you know the comfort of His presence, and the peace which He bestows, He will guard and keep your heart from this danger. He will quicken your soul, and help you to set your affection on things above. Believing in Christ, you will be one with Him, and the indwelling power of His grace and Spirit will be a new force in your moral being, lifting you up to higher and holier things, giving you a new sphere of thought and action, and thus moulding you in His own likeness till you sit down with Him in His kingdom.

But if this power and principle is to work mightily within, you need daily to nourish and sustain it by meditation in the Scripture. A single text of the Word, quietly pondered in the morning, may keep your heart in its right place all through the day. "He loved me and gave Himself for me." "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen *are eternal.*" Be thou faithful unto death and *I will give thee a crown of life.*" A single pas-

sage, such as any one of these, may be hidden in the heart, and even amidst life's busiest duties may effectually shield you from the growth of this cankerworm, the love of money.

Then remember to learn, by habitual exercise, the happiness of freely dispensing what God has given you. The gold and the silver is not yours : it is only entrusted to you as a steward. Learn how to use it in His service. Learn the joy of relieving misery, and of adding to the comfort of those around. Learn the privilege of giving liberally for the extension of Christ's kingdom. Be ready to open your hand wide to aid in mission work at home and abroad. Look out how you may assist needy relatives. Whatever you give out of love to Christ is laid out at good interest, and there is no risk about the capital. "Freely ye have received, freely give."

VII.

THE LOVE OF DRESS.

THERE is one part of the Marriage Service which I have often read with special pleasure. Imagine yourself in a church where a grand wedding is being celebrated. A crowd have assembled, and there is great interest on the part of many of the young folks in the church to get a good view of the bridal attire and of that of the bridesmaids. By and by the carriages drive up; there is a fluttering and a rustling; and the procession makes its way through the church. All that art and skill can effect is done to add beauty to those who take part in it. The exquisite bouquet, the lace veil, the tastily-made dress, the scarlet, and the blue, and the lavender mingled one with the other, all blending together and making a perfect whole. Then comes the Service, with its earnest notes of solemn promise and *fervent prayer*. The ring is placed on the finger,

the threefold blessing is pronounced, the psalm is read or sung, the additional petitions are offered, and then comes the Scripture exhortation, which ought not to be left out except under very special circumstances, or unless there be a short sermon, as the rubric permits.

It is the Scripture exhortation which always seems to me so very suitable.

We see the company in all the variety and display of costly dress, and the thoughts of many in the church far more occupied with this than with the Service itself. And then sounds out the good old words of the Apostle, who was himself a married man: "Ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the Word, they also may without the Word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation, coupled with fear. *Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible; even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.* For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their *own husbands,*" etc.

I always read this passage with pleasure, because it puts the matter in the true light ; it sheds a bright ray from the lamp of inspiration on the whole subject ; it puts that which is first in importance in the first place ; it puts side by side the shadow and the substance, the sham and the real, the false and the true, that which attracts for the moment and that which has an abiding worth and beauty.

I am not going to condemn all care and attention to dress. I am not going to say that we ought to pay no regard to elegance and suitableness in that which is worn. I confess I like to see everything beautiful in its place. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." This is true in its measure in all departments of life. At a wedding, for instance, what can be more suitable than fragrant and beautiful flowers, and the white or light-coloured dress, or such attire as makes the scene in harmony with such a festive occasion ?

Nor do I question the perfect right and propriety of persons with sufficient means dressing suitably to their position in life. There is no virtue in being slovenly in dress, or in anything else. There is no necessity to wear clothing *that makes you look strange and peculiar.* I *would have no one wear a bonnet such as would*

have suited the days of Queen Elizabeth. There is no call for a lady to wear a dress that might have done very well fifty years ago, or for a man of fair means to wear an old hat or a threadbare coat, or carry an old umbrella that is full of holes.

But to avoid such peculiarities as these is another thing altogether from dressing in the height of fashion, or thinking it right to copy everything new, whether becoming or otherwise. It is not the part of a sensible woman, still less of a godly one, to endeavour to dazzle every one around by a vain show of dress or jewellery. It is not requisite even for those in the highest position to have as many dresses as there are days or weeks in the year, or to spend a fortune in silks and satins, or to cast aside articles of clothing as good as new for the fancy of the moment, or to have the pleasure of buying a fresh one. We have promised in our baptism "to renounce the pomps and vanity of this wicked world ;" and if we act in this way are we not plainly breaking our vow ?

Be sure, this love of dress is a terrible little fox ! He is a dangerous, destructive little fellow ; he sometimes creeps into the breast of one far beyond threescore ; and the votary of the world, still "a lover of pleasure more than a

THE LOVE OF DRESS.

of God," endeavours to conceal the marks of advancing years by a style of dress more suitable for seventeen than seventy. And this love creeps into the heart of the young girl early in her teens, and occupies her thoughts more than it should. This fox not seldom steals the tender grapes of modesty, simplicity, affection, secret prayer, early piety, cheerfulness, and I know not what beside. It not only inflicts a deadly wound on the soul, from which it never recovers.

Oh! perhaps you think it looks so harmless, so small a matter, you will scarcely believe the mischief it has wrought in many a life and many a home.

But the love of dress is often an index of the state given to the world. It is the outward flag that tells the King's palace is in the hands of the

accept, so she ventures. Against all advice and entreaty of parents, she gains her own way, and the result is, that within a few months she wears a shroud; and instead of the giddy throng of the ball-room, she has her place in the lonely grave.

The love of dress not seldom leads to a terrible pitfall. Many a young woman in consequence has thrown herself into temptation and lost her way, and fallen as low as woman can. Who shall tell how often love of dress has paved the way for utter ruin and destruction, both in this life and in the next!

The love of dress is often the greatest enemy to calls of Christian benevolence. Many pounds will often be wasted on a needless dress, on a new sealskin jacket, on rings or brooches, and but a shilling will be found for the collection, or a refusal be given to subscribe something to the cause of Christ amongst the heathen at home or abroad. In many a congregation hundreds might be raised for Christ's cause if the money were given which is actually thrown away in extravagant expenditure of this kind.

At a Mission Service where many were led to give themselves to God, a lady was heard to say on leaving the church, "*No more expensive dresses for me.*" She determined henceforth to

give to the Lord's treasury whatsoever she could spare from her own expenditure in dress.

Frequently, also, the love of dress goes hand-in-hand with practical dishonesty as to debts. Debts are not paid, or not paid till long after they are due. Some years ago a clergyman was preaching to a very fashionable, well-dressed congregation, in which there were many ladies. He happened to know the secrets of some of their homes ; so he stopped in a sermon bearing on this matter, and put a question : " How many of these bonnets are paid for ? How many of these mantles and dresses are paid for ? " I fancy that sermon was not forgotten, and that not a few would eat their Sunday dinner with less appetite for such uncomfortable plainness of speech !

Before I close this paper I wish to recall your attention to the words of St. Peter with which I set out. There is a true beauty in dress ; there is an adorning which we ought by all means to cultivate. There is an apparel and sort of jewellery that has a glorious hue which will never fade, and that has a worth and value which cannot be overrated.

It is remarkable that St. Paul, as well as *St. Peter*, presents in a very forcible manner *the contrast between the apparel that is transi-*

tory and of the earth, and that which is heavenly and endureth. But yet the two Apostles present the contrast differently. Peter looks at the inner spring, and tells of the heart: he bids the wife put on "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," like "the holy women of old who trusted in God." Here is a rare and precious jewel; here is a garment above all price. Put on the Spirit of meekness, humility, quietness. Be clothed with gentleness and love, putting on the best garment,—the perfect righteousness of Christ, by faith in Him. Add to this the covering of His spirit, the mind that was in Him. Wear in your home and in society this raiment of a lowly, loving spirit. It will give you a beauty which can never fade away; it will make you a blessing in the family, and wheresoever you go. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. xxxi. 30.)

Paul, on the other hand, looks at the outward life, and the deeds of mercy and kindness which a Christian woman may perform. Like his brother Apostle, he utters a warning against excess in outward apparel, and contrasts with it the good works which may give a true beauty and adorning to the life. "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel,

with shamefacedness and sobriety ; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array ; but, which becometh women professing godliness, with good works."

Let each reader who wishes to act conscientiously consider this matter as in the sight of God. Be not led by companions or the custom of those around. Be careful, above all things, to have the best adorning,—that in which you can stand before your Father in Heaven. Ever be putting on, through the power of the Holy Spirit, more humility, love, holiness, thankfulness. Be zealous to adorn your life with all good works. Let it be your frequent prayer, "O Father, clothe me with the Robe of Righteousness, and ever behold me through Thy dear Son. Take from me all pride, vanity, worldliness, and endue me with the graces of Thy spirit and the likeness of Thy dear Son. Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon me, and prosper Thou the work of my hands upon me, yea, prosper Thou my handiwork !"

VIII.

MURMURING AND DISCONTENT.

EACH of the "little foxes" of which these papers speak has its own peculiarity. There is something that distinguishes it from the rest. If Selfishness is distinguished by the depth of the holes to which it retreats, Murmuring is recognized by the peculiarly painful whine which it is constantly uttering. You hear it almost a mile off. It falls upon the ear with a very grating, distressing sound. I have heard it from a passer-by in the street, and I have heard it the moment I have entered a house. Perhaps there may be some special trial, or things may be much as usual, but you still hear the old sound.

"No one had ever so much to bear as I have."
"It is a cold, bitter world, and it gets worse and worse." "I'm a slave to work, and there is no help for it."

In some shape like this, we often hear it, and *it casts a gloom wherever it comes.*

Whilst now and then we meet with a joyful, happy spirit, that never meets trouble half way, but is always hoping "things will mend," and sees "how much worse it might have been," and can find out a speck of blue sky in the darkest day, there are too many, alas, who cover up their sweetest mercies beneath the bushel of fears and evil anticipations, and go on their way a misery to themselves and all about them.

I have in my mind two types of this evil. They were in very different positions in life, and their trials also were very diverse.

In one case the trial which called forth this sin was doubtless very heavy. A widow lady was left with an only son. He went to sea, and the vessel was lost, and she never saw him again. It was a terrible blow ; but she nursed her sorrow and would take no comfort. She said God had dealt hardly with her, and she never could believe that He was a God of love. Whatever was said to her as to God's gift of His own Son for our salvation, of His promise never to leave comfortless those who trusted in Him, it was all in vain. She still continued repining and murmuring against God ; and instead of her affliction being sanctified to her soul's profit, I fear it only *led her to harden her heart against God.*

The other case was a more ordinary one.

It was a very old story. A woman had a large family, but a sickly constitution, and her means were only just sufficient. But her troubles were made a thousand-fold greater by the way she took them. You never saw a smile on her countenance, and you never heard her speak without complaining. She would complain of her landlord, of her boys, her husband, her garden, and I know not what. I knew her for years, and I think I never spoke to her but there was something of this kind. She buried herself in her troubles, and never looked at anything else. So no wonder this fox of Discontent was always heard near her door.

This sin of murmuring and discontent has its root in the fallen nature of man. It tells of a wrong state of heart. It springs from the will not being subdued to the will of God. Men forget their own sinfulness, and that they receive far less of evil than their iniquities deserve. They forget that, "God doeth according to His will in heaven and in earth, and that He giveth not account of any of His matters." They forget that this world is not to be our Paradise, but a training school for one above. They forget the constant mercies that a merciful Father is ever bestowing, whilst they fix their eye on the sorrow or disappointment that has come upon them.

But he cannot succeed. Few customers are seen at his counter, and he can only just pay his way if his capital is invested in farming, perhaps in seasons not good and the crops fall. Then he murmurs. He complains of the weather or whatever stands between him and success. If the love of money were not so strong in him he would find it far easier to be content with his present position: "Having food and raiment, he shall be therewith content."

Or take another cause. A young person very fond of change. She has a good salary and a comfortable home: she has opportunities of self-improvement and a mistress who cares for her welfare. But she is unsatisfied and unhappy. Her life is too quiet: she wants excitement. So she leaves her j

one to another. When asked why he so often moved, he said it was to find *contentment*: but as he never found it he missed his aim.

I remember one morning I was just starting on a journey to see a village where I felt probably my lot might be cast for some years. As the place was far from all old friends and in many ways a very lonely one, I was not very happy in the prospect. But a Christian friend gave me a word that helped me, and I have never forgotten it. It was a verse of one of Madam Guyon's :—

While place we seek or place we shun,
The soul finds happiness in none :
But with our God to guide our way
'Tis equal joy to go or stay.

There is a great truth in these lines. True peace and contentment is not to be found in one spot or another. Neither is it to be found in the removal of a particular grievance, or in some additional means of comfort or happiness.

I am quite aware that many things may aggravate the burden of our discontent, and something now and then may be found to lighten it, but the true remedy lies deeper than in anything external.

St. Paul gives us two or three precious lessons as to the cure of discontent.

He reminds us that "we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." It is all in vain to disturb our hearts with eagerness to grow rich. Such desire will pierce a man through with many sorrows. Nay, rather be satisfied with what is needful. Godliness is our true wealth. It is a portion we can carry with us. As to the rest, let us leave it. "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." (See 1 Tim. vi. 6—10.)

Then, in another place, he gives us his own example, and the secret of it. Few have had more to endure than he: few have had more privations. He had often been "in cold and hunger and nakedness." He had often been homeless and friendless. He had been exposed to the violence of bitter enemies, and to the fierce raging of the tempest. He had been reviled and beaten and stoned, and oftentimes at the very gate of death. But he had learnt to take it patiently, yea, joyfully. He could truly say that he had learnt "in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be content." And how was this? It was by leaning upon Christ. It was by looking to Him for grace and help. It was *by the inward* might of His Spirit. It was by

depending upon Him for strength continually. "I can do all things," he adds, "through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 13.)

Then there is one other view which he gives of this subject. It is the great motive for contentment,—the loving, unchangeable presence of Christ. A motive which ought ever to weigh with every true believer.

If a child of the world asks me how he can be contented under the losses and trials that come to him, I confess that I find it difficult to answer him. If you have not Christ and His love, I wonder how you can be contented. You have no true peace in your soul, you have no blessed home waiting for you above; and all the happiness you ever get will be from the poor, fading pleasures of the world, and then—darkness and gloom and death. Your only path is to humble yourself as a sinner, and seek pardon and salvation at once through Christ. But if you are Christ's, if you have His love in your heart, you may well be content. You have His loving, unchangeable presence. You have His sure and faithful promise: "*Be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" (Heb. xiii. 5.)

Brother, sister in Christ, open your eyes and see the unsearchable riches stored up for you in

this promise, and in all the promises assured to you in Him. You have the everlasting love of the great King. You have all your need supplied out of God's full bounty. You have a clear title to an inheritance above. You have an horizon of bliss, that stretches out farther and farther—far out of mental sight. Think of all this, and see if you have not reason to be content.

If a man lose a shilling, and gain a thousand pounds, ought he to grieve over the shilling he has lost? If you find a poor man and give him what is needful for his present wants, and can assure him of a great property that belongs to him, and of which he will shortly come into possession, ought he to complain and murmur if for the present moment he has much to put up with?

And is not this but a faint parallel between the Christian's present trials and future prospects? What are all present losses, troubles, sufferings, disappointments, compared with the everlasting love of God, and the blessed portion it brings?

I would give the Christian one parting word in conclusion. If you want to be a happy, contented, praising Christian, keep near to Christ and receive much from Him. If you want a bird *in a cage to sing*, you must give it plenty of fresh *air, suitable food*, and put it in the sunshine.

If you want the soul to sing with joyfulness and praise and thanksgiving, you must act in the same way.

Let there be the balmy air of heartfelt prayer and communion with God. Let there be the wholesome food of the promises of God and the teachings of His Word. Let there be the sunshine of Christ's presence and love. Abide in His love: keep in the sunshine. Watch against all unbelief, covetousness, and earthly care. So shall you ever be contented and at rest. If cross winds blow, if earthly gourds wither, if pleasant streams dry up, if bright flowers fade, if all joys below prove as a passing dream, you will still find peace. Looking up to Jesus, you will be able to leave all with Him.

If Thou should'st call me to resign
What most I prize,—it ne'er was mine!
I only yield Thee what was Thine:
Thy will be done!

IX.

ENVY.

ENVY,—a little fox and yet a great and terrible one. It is little, for it can lurk unseen in the remotest corner of the heart. It can hide itself unperceived where you would never suspect its presence. But it is *great* and *terrible*, for it bears the closest resemblance to the great Prince of Evil, and is the source and spring of the greatest crimes.

Can we call it a little *fox*? It certainly spoils all the tender grapes of love, kindness, benevolence, and the like. But still I think it deserves a worse name. I would rather call it by the name given by Jacob to Dan: "A serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horseheels so that his rider shall fall backward."

Yes, it is one of an evil brood. Malice, jealousy, envying, bitterness,—what are all these but deadly scorpions, serpents, crocodiles, *with evil eyes* ever seeking their prey, ever with

the poison of slander and evil-speaking doing endless mischief, and bringing untold misery to themselves as well as their victims?

But we speak of Envy. It is painted in no fair colours in the Word. Its deadly doings are unfolded before us, and we may see plainly how watchfully we should avoid it. "A sound heart is the life of the flesh; but envy the rottenness of the bones." "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" (Prov. xiv. 30; xxvii. 4.)

Envy,—what has it done? Let us see.

Go to the first congregation that ever assembled for Divine worship. Two brothers meet and bring their offerings. One is brought in faith, obedience, and humility. The other is brought in a very different spirit. The offering itself was not acceptable, neither was the temper and spirit of him who brought it. So the sacrifice of Abel is marked with God's approval, but that of his elder brother is rejected. Then comes envy. Cain hates his brother, and lifts up his hand against him. The first murder has been wrought, and righteous Abel lies slain beside his altar.

And does not this evil affection still come in to mar the worship and the service of God? Whence comes too often the strife that creeps

into the Church, the Sunday School, the vestry-meeting, or the assemblies of the Church's pastors or officers? One man is preferred to a higher position or to a higher class. One member is invited to speak or pray, whilst another is not. A certain pew is a great bone of contention, and offence is taken if other persons are asked to sit in it. One person is supposed to be slighted because not asked to be present on such an occasion. Ah, where is the parish and congregation where such things as these have not disturbed the peace and harmony that ought ever to prevail in the Church of God!

But take another example of envy. There is a large family of brothers. One of them, a younger one, walks in the fear of God, whilst the others walk in the way of their own eyes. The younger brother is a favourite with his father and receives special proofs of his love. More than this, he has dreamed a dream: the sheaves in the field make obeisance to his sheaf. He dreams again: and the sun and moon and stars bow down to him. He tells his dreams, and this stirs up the anger and jealousy of his brethren: so they wait for an opportunity to do him harm. At length they are with him in *the field*, and rise up against him and cast him

into a pit. Then covetousness comes in, and they sell him to the Midianites. They deceive their old father by saying that his son has been slain by some evil beast. Meanwhile Joseph is carried into Egypt and serves in Potiphar's house.

Ah, what years of misery did envy thus bring into this family! And still in home-life envy is found at work. It breeds constant disputes between brother and brother; it separates those who should be of one heart and soul; it generates hard, bitter words of a parent's ways and doings; it stirs up the husband to reproach the wife,—perhaps for that which is quite beyond her control. One member of the family loves to bring up some old grievance, or a fault committed years ago. Or perhaps a taunt is uttered because such a one was of humbler birth, or had less means than another.

Yea, even at the funeral of a parent or a brother, I have known envy to break out. The will is opened. One receives less than he expects. And whilst the deceased has scarcely been an hour in the grave, sad bickerings and heart-burnings and angry words disturb the peace of those who have thus met together.

Then from envy comes the fearful sin of evil-speaking. At breakfast or dinner, perhaps, the

whole conversation is about the faults or mistakes of some one else. It is so easy to see the spots on another's dress, or the threadbare coat, or perhaps the gray hair, or the bald head, or the stooping gait; and as easy is it to discover and blaze abroad some evil thing of those we know.

Sometimes there is a saving clause. There comes a little spice of praise, and then a whole bushel of blame. "Such a one is well disposed—he means no harm—but—but—but" And then one thing is said after another, which, if they were true, would prove he was very ill-disposed, and meant a great deal of harm.

Would that we all remembered the caution of our Lord about the mote and the beam! Too often is there a huge beam in our own eye, when after all it is but the tiniest splinter we love to talk about in a neighbour. It were wise for us all to be very cautious what we say at our own fireside: we may spread about a report that may injure another more than we think. We may teach children and servants this evil habit of slander. We may reap a harvest of trouble for the repetition of an unguarded word. "Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought" (envy); "*and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber*" (*evil-speaking in the home*): "for a bird of the

air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter." (Eccles. x. 20.)

But we have other illustrations of the power of envy. A young man is honoured of God to strike a blow for his country and to slay the proud giant who defied the armies of the Living God. Shouts of triumph arise, and the whole country rejoices in one who has succoured them in their hour of peril. But this is too much for the king. "Saul eyed David from that day henceforth." Never did he cease to seek to slay him. And though David loved and honoured him as the anointed of the Lord, and returned only good for evil, yet was David never safe for a moment from the envy of the king.

We remember, too, a chief councillor in the court of Babylon. He is faithful in all things, and fulfils to the uttermost every duty laid upon him. But envy comes in. His advancement has made him enemies: so they seek his ruin. They make him an offender because of his fidelity to Jehovah. When the writing is signed that no prayer shall be made but to the king, they bring their accusation. They compel the king to order him to be cast in the lions' den. But it is all in vain. Their malice and envy *only covers them with shame and brings them*

to destruction. They fall into the pit they made for Daniel ; and the lions gain the mastery over them ere ever they reach the bottom of the den.

It was the same with wicked Haman and Mordecai. Through envy Haman seeks to slay Mordecai and all the seed of the Jews throughout the kingdom. But the judgment falls upon his own head. Haman is hung upon the gallows he made for Mordecai.

These instances may remind us that "high places are slippery places." Envy creeps into courts and palaces. Men and women in high rank and position are not free from the snare. The murder of rulers and princes is often brought about by it. The schemes and intrigues of place-hunters are often ruinous to the best interests of a country. Terrible wars desolate whole provinces, and nations lose their best and bravest sons through the insatiable envies and jealousies and ambitions of a powerful monarch.

I name but one other example of the fearful effects of this evil. It brought about the greatest crime which man ever committed. There once appeared on earth a Man without spot of sin. In every action He was holy, harmless, and undefiled. Moreover, His whole *life was one act of unwearied benevolence. He never sought His own, but was ever seeking the*

weal of others. But envy slew Him. "The chief priests for envy delivered Him to Pilate;" they ceased not their efforts until He was condemned: yea, even when in His grave, envy feared lest He should arise to their confusion. Though purposed in the infinite wisdom and goodness of God as a ransom and propitiation for the sins of the whole world, yet it was through envy that wicked men with wicked hands crucified and slew the Prince of life.

Yea, so great a sin is envy that it nailed to the cross the incarnate Son of God. Nothing is too bad,—nothing too great a sin for envy to dare and to do.

"From envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, good Lord, deliver us!"

But how can this evil be overcome and rooted out? What means shall we employ to rid us of this destructive foe?

Remember, it is only in Christ that you can overcome. You must be in Him by faith, and abide in Him, if you would have power against any temptation. And it is very especially so in this case. It is Christ dwelling in the heart by His Spirit, by whom alone you can gain the victory. If you want to live a holy, loving, Christ-like life, you must believe in Him as your Saviour, and trust in Him as your Helper. The

joy of Christ's salvation, the peace which He giveth, the comfort of His love, subdues the natural envy and corruption of the heart.

Besides this, He gives special grace for special need. We read in James iv., "*The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.*" But what follows? "*He giveth more grace.*" If there be the envious spirit rising up continually, there is grace given to trample down this serpent's head.

Then another rule. Take a good antidote for this vice. Mingle together a few grains of self-knowledge, a few grains of true humility, and add a few drops of the oil of charity, and take it whenever you are tempted to think evil or speak evil of another. This will be an unfailing remedy for all times and seasons when needed.

Then offer genuine intercessory prayer on behalf of any one against whom you are likely to offend in this way. Pray for those over you, or whose success seems to overshadow your own, or whose interests clash with your own. Stir up your heart through the Spirit to pray for them, and in the battle-field of your secret chamber you will conquer this evil before you descend into the arena of common life.

Last of all, I would say, be envious: but in a right way. Cherish envy: but mind the direction *it takes*. Envy those in possession of great grace,

and follow in their footsteps, and overtake them if you can. Envy all those excellent virtues which you see in your fellow-Christians, and whatsoever is right and good even in the children of the world. If you see one noted for his thoughtfulness and considerateness for others, determine to be like him. If you see one walking in very close fellowship with God, ask yourself why you do not yourself more enjoy the same communion. If you see one abounding in all good works, liberal in gifts, ready to help the poor and needy, ever having a kind word for one and another, walk in his footsteps.

“Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works.”

X.

DISTRACTION IN PRAYER.

I HAVE no intention of saying much about the listless, heartless prayers which some persons are content to offer. Not a few professing Christians go to church from Sunday to Sunday, but in God's sight their worship is altogether in vain. The lips speak, but the heart is dumb: the knee is bent, but the soul is unhumbled. Their thoughts are in the end of the earth. Whether it be the confession, or the thanksgiving, the prayers or the hymns and chants, it matters not; for business and a multitude of worldly matters engage the mind, and there is no room for true worship.

I heard a man one day boasting of his devotion to business. He was a wealthy man, and had more than a thousand workmen employed in his factory. "Seven days a week," he said, "my mind is full of my work. If I came to *hear you*, unless it were something very striking, *I should not know a word you had been saying.*"

I am afraid such a spirit is very common. Even those who go regularly from habit to the House of God are often living altogether unmindful of the truths they hear, or of the petitions they offer. Such is mere lip service, and profits nothing, but is rather abomination in the sight of God. How many sit before God as His people, and yet not one solitary petition is offered in earnest during the whole service. All kinds of subjects fill the mind and occupy the attention. Money, dress, letters, orders in business, a coming entertainment, yea even envious and malicious thoughts, are permitted to reign within the heart, and those who are apparently devout worshippers are content to have it so.

If this be so with any reader, remember the grievous sin you commit. God is not mocked. He has a window into your heart, and sees the innumerable multitude of vain thoughts which occupy the temple where He would dwell. You cannot deceive Him with such formal and hypocritical worship. You want thorough conversion to God. You want the Holy Ghost to awaken your conscience and show you your peril. You need to be born again: you need a new heart and a right spirit. You are yet unsaved, and unless you flee to Christ for pardon and grace *you will be undone for ever.*

I remember reading an incident that bears upon this point. A lady in church was struck one day with the last prayer in the service: "Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of Thy servants, as may be most expedient for them," etc. The thought occurred to her, "What desires and petitions have I offered to God? I have never really asked God for anything." Conviction of a life of sin, and of her dead and profitless worship, flashed across her. The Holy Spirit worked mightily within her heart, and she saw plainly that she had been hitherto a stranger to God. The following Sunday she came in a very different spirit. With her whole heart she could now enter into the words of the General Confession: "We have erred and gone astray like lost sheep. . . . We have left undone the things we ought to have done, and have done the things we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us."

But whilst with some there has been nothing better than lip worship all their days, yet on the other hand there are many true, humble-minded Christians, who deeply grieve over their wanderings in prayer. They would fix their thoughts, but they cannot. They would pray with the *whole heart*, but something comes in, perhaps *some thought* on the subject about which they

are praying, some thought about yesterday's trouble or to-morrow's work, or a pressing duty, or a visit to a friend, or a bill to be met ; and it carries them right away, and a little afterwards they recollect themselves, and very far indeed have they travelled from the felt presence of God. This experience is constantly a source of fear and distress to them. The sin is confessed but yet returns. This little fox, distraction and wandering in prayer, mars their joy both in private and in public worship ; it makes them afraid at times that they are not truly the followers of Christ.

Now how can this evil be met ? How can this little fox be killed, or kept out of the vineyard ?

I fear that we shall never be wholly free from its incursions, but we may be enabled by God's grace in some measure to keep it under.

It is well before prayer in church or at home to secure a few quiet, silent moments of meditation. We want to place ourselves consciously in the presence of God. Through the help of the Spirit we should think of some word of Scripture that may help us. "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." "Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father

which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly." Let us say to ourselves: "My Father is here: He seeth in the secret chamber of my heart; He is present to mark each desire, each sigh, each word of prayer." Let us look up and behold our great High Priest, pleading for us before the throne, and yet bending down His ear to hearken to the petitions which we offer. Let us see Him and realise Him to be very nigh,—nearer than the one sitting by us in the church; nearer to us when praying in secret than a mother to the child whom she is nursing on her lap. We want more faith in prayer. Nothing keeps off vain, impertinent, restless, untimely thoughts as this does. If we have faith that Christ is nigh, that He is favourable to us because we trust only in His blood and mediation, that He has all help for every need and emergency, and that He is faithful in hearing and abundantly fulfilling our petitions, this will help us more than anything.

My first remedy therefore for this evil is to *exercise more faith*. Speak as in God's ear. Do not pray as if you were praying in the air, or to yourself, or to the walls of your room, or to the pastor in the church; but pray as if you saw *Christ before you with your very eyes*. Ask of *Him what you wish and require*, as if you heard

'His voice at the moment saying to you, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." True, genuine, lively faith like this will do for you more than many rules.

But a few other hints may be added.

Pray with your lips as well as with your heart.

I am persuaded that in most cases it is helpful to use the voice in prayer. In church it is helpful to yourself, and to the rest of the congregation, when you repeat audibly the petitions in our beautiful Liturgy. If we uttered aloud our general confession, and the various responses, it would make our worship far more lively and profitable. I have read of one instance where a careless man was awakened to a deep conviction of his sin by the earnest reality with which a working man by his side repeated the confession. It stirs up also the heart of the minister when he thus hears the devout and hearty responses of the people.

In private prayer also it is a means of help to repeat audibly the prayers you offer. It drives away drowsiness. It helps the memory. It stirs up the heart to some kindred petitions. So that where it is possible I would counsel you to utter aloud the prayers and praises which you present before the mercy seat.

Then learn the habit of *frequent self-recollection*.

Keep your spirit under the control of careful watchfulness; and when you find you have wandered in thought, forget the past and pray afresh; ever trusting in the atoning blood to remove the iniquity of your holy things, the pollution of the "unclean lips," stir up the heart anew that the petitions which yet remain may be more fervent for any that have been lost through a wandering mind.

Endeavour to *throw double earnestness into such prayers as sum up all your various needs*.

For instance, in the Litany perhaps you are conscious that several of the petitions have been offered, but you have not heartily followed some of them; but as it is drawing to a close you have one that seems to sum up all your spiritual necessities: "That it may please Thee to give us true repentance, to forgive us all our sins, negligences, and ignorances, and to endue us with the grace of Thy Holy Spirit, to amend our lives according to Thy Holy Word." Let your whole soul be thrown into this prayer, and in answer to it what various gifts and graces may you expect!

In the same way, whether in church or in *family or private worship, the Lord's Prayer should especially call forth our faith and hope.*

It is inclusive both of temporal and spiritual benefits. It is on behalf of the whole church as well as of ourselves. Therefore, whenever it occurs, let it waken us up to new effort and expectation. If in family worship attention has flagged, and we have not been able, as we would wish, to keep pace with the various requests made, yet let us not fail to offer every syllable of this prayer so that the season of blessing may not pass unimproved.

And then, above all, never forget to *honour the Holy Ghost as the author and prompter of all genuine prayer.*

Every throb of spiritual life is His work. Every acceptable petition is His breathing in the soul. It is only in the Spirit that you can ever pray so that your Father shall hear you. Without His aid the altar of the heart is dead and cold. Without His grace the bubbling spring is dried up. Without His perpetual assistance the flame will not ascend nor the water flow.

No words bear more directly on the subject of this paper than our Lord's words to the woman by the well: "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." (St. John iv. 24.) And the Lord Himself tells us the secret power by which

but the water that I shall give him a well of water, springing up to life" (ver. 13, 14.)

Here is the secret of true, heavenly prayer. You must have the grace to pray; you must ever be looking to Jesus for this living water, which shall satisfy your heavenly affections, in fervent prayer and thankful praises, even to everlasting

XI.

DAILY WORRIES.

WHY, we have here a whole tribe of these dangerous enemies! With many really faithful conscientious people they are often the very worst foes that creep into their vineyard.

They take off the bloom and beauty of the fruit. They destroy the grapes before they are ripe. They dim the Christian's joy, so that he cannot let the world see the happiness Christ gives. They consume the strength which he wants for service. They shut his lips so that he can seldom praise God in gladness of heart. They dishonour the glorious Gospel, and misrepresent the service of our great Master. So that by all means we ought not to let them alone. We want to search them out: we want to know how best we may get quit of them; or, if we cannot do this at once, we want to do our best, and keep them within bounds; and *perhaps by and by* we may be free from them

altogether, or at least prevent them doing real harm to our pleasant fruits.

In the very happiest condition it is quite unavoidable that we should often be subject to their attacks. Worries spring up from every point of the compass: there is no quarter from which they may not come; there is no relation in life but is fruitful in producing them. More or less our natural constitution has to do with them. We may naturally be excitable, or nervous, or gloomy, or depressed, and then a disposition of the sort lays hold of the least thing, and turns it into a trouble or a care. Our bodily members may any one of them become the inlet of some annoyance, or suffering, or distress. The hand, the foot, the eye, the ear, a troublesome tooth, the aching head, a rheumatic limb, a stiff joint,—any one of these, may be a perpetual trial and weariness to the spirit though others may know but little or nothing about it.

Then look at the causes of worry that may arise in the home. A smoky chimney which won't be cured, a brickfield which comes close to your garden, a new house which overlooks your own, a large factory which sends forth volumes of smoke opposite your window, a neighbour living next door who is always quarrelling with

you, or something else which has a peculiar power of disturbing the quietness of your mind,—this is your worry, and it never lets you alone.

Then again, how frequently these petty troubles come to us through those we know and love. Human nature at the very best has many weak points, and we are not slow to discover them in those who live with us or with whom we have much to do. Husband and wife cannot quite see alike about some domestic arrangement; a child is unruly and will not learn his lessons; a servant is always late in the morning, or dinner cannot be ready in time, or the room is only half swept or dusted; a friend is forgetful of a promise or inconsiderate of your feelings; a parent or guardian domineers over you, and does not give you the liberty you think you have a right to. Who can tell the unmentioned worries that come to us from causes like these?

Ah, these worries come to us in every imaginable way, and through every imaginable channel. They come to us now and then through the mistakes of some thoroughly Christian brother, or through the infirmities of very good people, and sometimes through the malice and wickedness and perversity of those who are

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far from God. They come to us through apparently trivial accidents. A letter is too late, a book is lost, something is mislaid. A rainy day spoils our plans ; a train has not brought a friend we looked for ; a favourite dog has strayed away ; a wheel in the parish machinery or in our Day or Sunday school has stopped its work : something somewhere about some matter or other has gone wrong, and we seem left in a strait, and are burdened and oppressed and troubled.

But whilst it is easy to see our worries, it is not by any means easy to bear them patiently or to cast them off. It is not easy to know what to do when one thing after another comes to disturb the mind. It is not easy to put away cares and anxieties about events which are coming on, and perhaps heavy sorrows which are looming in the distance. But a few helpful thoughts may be suggested. We may have more of God, and then the world's troubles will affect us less. We may gather from the treasury of His Word cheering light to guide us by the way.

And the first word of help I would suggest is *this* :—that we must see a *Father's hand* in our *lesser trials and cares* as much as in the *greater ones*.

David recognised the hand of God in Absalom rising against him in rebellion, but he saw it no less in Shimei throwing stones and dust and casting bitter words at him by the way. So let us see God's hand in everything. These petty troubles and vexations are a part of our schooling for heaven. They are just as much sent from above as the fierce storm that wrecks our home and leaves us desolate in a cold world. They all come to prove us and to humble us and to draw out the grace which God hath given us, to break the tie that binds us too closely to earth, and to knit the tie that may draw us nearer to heaven. Let us ever fix this in our minds. Let us say to ourselves, "My Father has permitted this. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him; the very hairs of our head are numbered by Him; so I will look up and believe and hope: I will trust where I cannot see. He is too wise to err, too good to be unkind."

A second point I would suggest is this:—whilst we trust in our Father's care, we must not spare *active effort* to remove the cause of worry.

If you will not rise up at night to close a door or to fasten a rattling window, you need not be surprised if perchance you lose a night's rest. So is it in many other things. A little de-

terminated effort may set many things right that would otherwise annoy you. Take things in time; make prudent arrangements for the future; think how to meet coming difficulties; use common sense in ordering your affairs, and you may save yourself many an unhappy hour. God's promises are never to hinder our diligence, but rather to encourage it. We must depend entirely upon God's help, but we must wisely and diligently use the means which He hath given us.

But the great remedy for worries is simple, childlike, trustful *prayer*.

The Divine remedy is the sure and unfailing one: "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." (Phil. iv. 6.) "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." (1 Pet. v. 7.)

If we would be freed from harassing, distressing fears and cares, we must ever be exercising ourselves in this. Taking up our position as forgiven, reconciled children, by faith in the precious blood of Christ, we must learn to go boldly to the mercy-seat and leave all our troubles there. Every new care or worry should *be like the sound of a bell calling us to prayer. It should quicken us to lift up our hearts to*

God. Hannah brought her care and sorrow to the Lord and left it with Him, for she went away and her countenance was no more sad. Hezekiah spread the letter before the Lord, and then soon his enemies were scattered and dispersed. So we should bring everything to God.

What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear ;
What a privilege, to carry
Everything to God in prayer.

Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what endless pain we bear ;
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

But in such prayer we want to be very real. We often lose the comfort we might gain by mere generalities. Tell the Lord what you require or are anxious about, and then leave the matter in His hands.

A young barrister was without a brief. "Do you pray about it?" was the question put to him by a godly relative. "Oh, yes: I pray to God to preserve and bless me." "But do you pray for parchments?" "Well, no: I never distinctly did that." The young man learnt the lesson: his prayer was heard; and not long after he had as much work as he could well do.

Pray distinctly about the special matter that

is on your mind. I have often found a comfort in a single word summing up the whole cause of anxiety. Try the plan. Whoever or whatever it be, utter it before God. "*Lord, that particular person, that business, that bill that must be paid, that responsibility that lies upon me,—school, health, house, money, friend, my sight, hearing,—undertake for me. Order what is best. Remove the burden or give me grace to bear it.*"

Cast on Him thy smallest care,
Utter but one word of prayer,
Tell Him thy most hidden grief,
Sure He'll run to thy relief.

Unspeakable rest of spirit is there in thus placing in the Lord's hand the matter that weighs upon the mind. However perplexing or distressing, He can find out the best way of ordering it for our good. He can re-knit the broken thread, or unloose the ruffled skein, and bring light out of deepest darkness.

There is one other suggestion I would make. Find refuge from worries in *the tenderness and sympathy of Christ*. It is such peace to trust oneself and all we have to His unfailing care. "My troubles are near," you may say, "always hovering around me on every side, but my *Saviour-Friend* is nearer still,—He dwells in my *heart, He is ever at hand*: and here can I rest in

peace. The world may look coldly upon me, old friends may forget and foes may be cruel and bitter, but my Saviour-Friend is infinitely kind ! His heart never grows cold nor His ear heavy. He will never leave me nor forsake. He will be my Shepherd to guard and guide me, therefore I need never be afraid. My wants may be great, my sorrows great, but my Saviour-Friend has all resources at His disposal. He is rich to all that call upon Him, and He maketh all things work together for good : therefore I have peace. I stay my weary spirit on this Rock, and I know that I shall never be confounded."

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee : because he trusteth in Thee." (Isa. xxvi. 3.)

"These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world." (John xvi. 33.)

XII.

HOW SHALL I CONQUER ?

How shall I conquer? It is no easy question to answer. For though we may flatter ourselves that our foes are not so formidable because they seem to be little ones, yet their name is Legion. We have to battle with innumerable hosts of these crafty marauders. They are like wasps in a hot summer, when it is said, if you kill one, half a dozen come to the funeral. So it is with the foes of the vineyard. We cannot reckon up one of a thousand. In these papers I have selected a few specimens: Indolence, Selfishness, Indecision, Love of Money, Love of Dress, Envy, Murmuring, and the like; yet these are but a few out of many. Multitudes beside are close at hand to attack us when they may. At all times, by all sorts of devices, at every possible inlet, they are ready to fall upon us and do us *an injury*. We might speak of errors creeping *into the Church of God* and destroying the

purity of the faith, or of doubts as to the truth of God's Word, which are so perilous to many souls. We might speak of the questionings of our unbelieving hearts as to the dealings of God in Providence, or the fulfilment of His gracious promises. We might speak of those unchaste and unholy thoughts which defile the soul, or the various evil tempers which disturb the quietness of home life. Whole tribes and armies of these our enemies are round about us, and ever seeking to do us a mischief.

But again we ask ourselves, How shall we conquer? It is said, "There is no royal road to learning," and so I would say, *There is no royal road to victory.*

I mean, there is no new and easy way by which we may dispense with pains and effort, and trouble. We must follow the old paths that the saints of God have taken in days that are past. We must take the lamp of truth in our hands, and learn the means which God hath appointed for this purpose, and then struggle on with courage and hope.

And there is encouragement in doing this. God hath promised us the victory. "Sin shall not have dominion over you." "He shall subdue our iniquities." "He will bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

Only follow the directions of the Word, and you may expect a conquering life now, and a final and complete conquest by and by. The vineyard shall be cleared, your foes shall be slain, and tears and trials and temptations shall be no more.

Perhaps we might be able to sum up our duty and our strength in this matter in one direction: "*Build two new walls for the protection of the vineyard.*"

The old fence has too many gaps and breaches. In the life of the past there has been too little New Testament Christianity. There has been too much of the spirit of the world. There has not been the love, the reality, the zeal, the earnestness, the walking after the example of the Master, that there should have been. Hence it has been an easy thing for the foxes to make their way in and do great damage to such fruit as was found. But let us build, by God's grace, two new walls, and these will do much toward keeping off the enemy.

Our first wall must be *more full confidence in the power and grace of Christ.*

We must exercise more faith, and exercise it continually. We must learn to know the *all-sufficiency* of His Almighty power, and the *nearness* of His help to all who rely upon Him.

Two passages of the Word should ever be linked together in our memories: the one we may call the lock, the other the key. The lock: "Without Me ye can do nothing." The key: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

It is only by true, lively, constant faith, that we can possibly overcome the temptations which in such various forms the world presents to us. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John v. 4, 5.) And when we read the wonderful narrative of God's heroes in Heb. xi., and the conflicts in which they triumphed though all the powers of earth and hell were leagued against them, may we not learn the secret of victory in our conflict with the less prominent evils of which we chiefly speak?

It was by faith they conquered, and by faith we must conquer also. We must put forth our faith in moments when temptation is strongest. We must have faith to assure ourselves that Christ is with us, by our very side, according to His promise. We must have faith to believe that His way is better than ours when the path looks dark and dreary. We must have faith to

believe that He can lift us up, and hold us up when we are falling, and restore us when we have sinned. We must have faith to commit our souls to His keeping, and to rest in His faithfulness and love.

It was the saying of a Christian woman who had many sorrows and many fears: "I live upon that word of Christ, that He will 'in no wise cast out' those who come to Him. A hundred times a day I pray myself out of my own keeping into the keeping of Jesus."

Here, then, is one means of safety. We must trust the Saviour and trust Him fully. We must trust Him to ward off by His mighty arm the temptation which is too strong for us, and to strengthen us inwardly by the power of His Spirit. We must trust Him to cheer us with the consolation of His presence, and to give us needful help in every duty we have to perform.

Oh, help me, Jesus, from on high !
I know no help but Thee ;
Oh, help me so to live and die
As Thine in heaven to be !

But with this we must add another safe-guard: we must build another wall. We must exercise *humble, prayerful watchfulness, against every form of evil.*

We must watch against peril that comes through the intellect as well as through the heart. We must guard against sceptical doubts and ensnaring errors. Through an increasing knowledge of Scripture, we must gain fuller confidence in its perfection and glory, and be able more clearly to discern the false views that would turn us from it.

We must refuse to act contrary to God's will in any matter, however much pleasure or profit the temptation may promise. We must rather tread a path of briars and thorns in the way of duty, than a path strewn with roses if it be a way of sin.

I have often thought of a lesson that may be taught us by a few words of the first Napoleon : it had reference to his second marriage. Paying no regard to the plain command of God, or the terrible sorrow he inflicted on one who had been faithful to him for above fifteen years, he divorced Josephine and married the young Marie Louise, Archduchess of Austria. He expected that the marriage would tend to the strengthening of his dynasty ; but it turned out just the other way. It was one cause amongst many of the overthrow of his dominion. And in his later days he saw it and spoke of it. "That marriage," *said he*, "was the cause of my destruction. In

contracting it *I placed my foot on an abyss covered over with flowers.*"

Ah, how many do the same thing ! The path of pleasure or of worldly ambition, the eagerness to be rich, the tasting of the forbidden fruit of some sinful self-indulgence, the choice of an attractive companion whose influence is against all that is holy and good,—how often something of this kind proves to be an abyss covered over with flowers ! On the surface you see the flowers : there is much that is pleasant to the eye and gratifying to the natural tastes. But look beneath. There is a depth into which you may fall : bitter remorse, a wretched home, the loss of all true peace, a hopeless grave, a dark, dark hereafter. Yes, this may be the abyss into which you may be beguiled.

Therefore, if you would be safe, watch continually. Never think of any sin as if it were but a little one. The greatest misery may lurk beneath a single thought of evil cherished in the heart.

And whilst you watch, *pray* also.

Watch, as if on that alone
Hung the issue of the day ;
Pray, that help may be sent down :
Watch and pray."

And your prayers will be answered. You will

be kept from evil. You will be enabled to pass through things temporal so that you lose not the things eternal.

Watching unto prayer, relying upon the mighty arm of the Saviour, humbly treading the path of the cross, you need fear nothing. Temptations there may be, small and great : a legion of foes may desire your destruction, but the Good Shepherd will keep you to the end. Protected by His tender care you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of His hand.

“Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy ; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

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